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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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DA WASHDC FOR SASA  
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CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR  
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD  
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD  
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PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: OPRC KMDR IS

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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11. Mideast

12. Iraq

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Key stories in the media:  
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All media reported that two barrels packed with 15 kg. of explosives each washed up on beaches in Ashdod and Ashkelon yesterday, in what Israeli security sources said was a carefully planned and

coordinated terrorist attack emanating from Gaza and targeting Israeli ships, ports and naval bases. On Friday, a number of explosions were heard off the Gaza coast, likely caused by additional devices that were thrown out to sea. Islamic Jihad, the Popular Resistance Committees, and FatahQs Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for the blasts. Officials were quoted as saying that the bombs may have been meant to act as naval mines, detonating upon contact with a ship. Defense officials said Palestinian terrorists have been trying for years to strike at Israel Navy ships that patrol along the Gaza coast. Some defense commentators have linked the attacks to the assassination of senior Hamas activist Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in Dubai on January 20. Leading Israeli media reported that Dubai is not allowing Hamas to investigate al-Mabhouh's murder.

The Jerusalem Post quoted a senior Israeli Government official as saying yesterday that Israel has no intention of acceding to PA President Mahmoud AbbasQ call for a freeze of all construction in West Bank settlements and in East Jerusalem for three months, in order to resume direct negotiations with the PA.

Major media quoted DM Ehud Barak as saying yesterday in an unusually sharp tone that the stalled peace process with Syria could bode ill for the future of the Middle East and even lead to comprehensive war. Yediot cited a Pentagon report that Syria has acquired missiles capable of carrying chemical warheads.

HaQaretz reported that restoration work near the Al-Aqsa Mosque could destroy the remnants of Israel's relations with the Muslim world.

HaQaretz reported that last year the IDF downplayed the significance of the proceedings against two senior officers who had exceeded their authority in authorizing artillery fire during Operation Cast Lead. However, the daily writes that the army is increasing its efforts to teach commanders the laws of warfare.

Leading media reported that yesterday, during a visit to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum, Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi drew a parallel between Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Adolf Hitler. Berlusconi also said that his great dream is for Israel to join the E.U.

Israel Hayom reported that Judge Richard Goldstone has ties with anti-Israeli organizations.

The Jerusalem Post reported on the involvement of Knesset members in demonstrations in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. The newspaper quoted conservative Kadima Knesset Member Arie Bibi as saying that the left-wing protesters are a fifth column against Israel and cited a claim by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel that police are violating activistsQ rights.

Yediot led with speculative reporting by its senior diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer that Sara Netanyahu, the PMQs wife, may have thwarted the nomination of former Consul General in New York, Alon Pinkas, to the U.N. ambassadorship. Yediot reported that Bracha Shor, a confidante of Sara Netanyahu, sent Pinkas an e-mail, saying that Mrs. Netanyahu is the person who decides on the issue. Yediot quoted the Prime MinisterQs Office as saying that the allegations about the PMQs wife are total lies.

Maariv reported that the New Israel Fund threatens to sue the NPO Im Tirtzu that accused it of hostility against the state. The Jerusalem Post cited a claim by the TaxpayersQ Alliance, a British watchdog group, that E.U. aid is funding PA incitement.

The media continued to discuss a sensitive speech delivered last week by Arab Knesset Member Ahmad Tibi (United Arab List) before the Knesset plenum to commemorate International Holocaust Day, which called for mutual recognition of the otherQs suffering. TibiQs speech was hailed as a model of understanding.

Yediot ran a feature on the family of Egyptian banker Ahmad al-Aroussi, who received fertility treatment at the Tel Hashomer Hospital and became QIsraelQs best friends in Cairo.

HaQaretz reported that Israel should shortly be removed from the

U.S. blacklist of countries that fail to protect pharmaceutical patents adequately. Nonetheless, the newspaper quoted sources in the pharmaceuticals market as saying that the country will move to the list of countries that the U.S. is monitoring for such violations.

The Jerusalem Post quoted the Bank of Israel as saying yesterday that economic developments in the last quarter of 2009 support the assessment that there was a sharp turnaround in Israel's economic and financial environment in the second half of the year and that firm growth was to be found in real activity.

HaQaretz reported that the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labor told Intel Israel that if it wants to receive the \$400 million grant it has requested from the state, it must undertake to stay in the country for a long time.

HaQaretz reported that a diary and a revealing letter written by notorious Auschwitz death camp physician, Dr. Josef Mengele, were put on auction in the U.S. last month for a starting price of \$60,000.

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II. Mideast:  
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II. QHelping Abbas Climb down the High Tree

Palestinian affairs correspondent Khaled Abu Toameh wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (2/2): QPalestinian Authority officials have described [U.S. Special Envoy George] Mitchell's proposals as positive, saying they could pave the way for Abbas to start his descent from the tall tree he had climbed when he set a series of conditions for returning to the negotiating table. According to the officials, the latest American ideas include placing additional territories in the West Bank under the exclusive control of the PA, the release of Fatah prisoners from Israeli jails, and halting IDF incursions into PA-controlled communities. The officials said that Abbas was under heavy pressure from the Europeans, Americans, and some Arab countries to accept Mitchell's proposals and resume the peace talks with Israel. QThe [Palestinian] President wants to resume the peace negotiations, but he doesn't want it to look as if he has succumbed to the pressure, said one official in Ramallah. QThe resumption of the peace talks needs to be done gradually and one idea is to begin with low-level or indirect talks between the two sides.

II. QGet Real, Get Down

Gershon Baskin, Co-Director of the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (2/2): QSeventeen years after the Oslo process began, Netanyahu and his cabinet are quite aware of the Palestinian red lines. They know what would be an acceptable formula for reaching a peace agreement. Rather than continuing the charade of trying to convince someone that Israel is interested in negotiations, it would be more honest to put our cards on the table: the demands of this government and those of the Palestinian people are irreconcilable. The same thing can be said of the Palestinians.... If the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Government really want to achieve peace, as they claim, they would be honest with their publics and put on paper their vision of the peace agreement that the other side could accept -- not their maximalist opening negotiating positions, but their realistic peace offer. Since it seems that we cannot depend on the international community to guide us to the shores of peace, the leaders of Israel and Palestine should stop dragging their feet and present a serious plan to their people. There is no reason for one side to wait for the other to take the first step. If both sides are as serious in action as their speeches imply,

negotiations will actually have a chance of reaching agreement.

### III. QMany Wanted Hamas Man Dead

Palestinian affairs correspondent Avi Issacharoff wrote in the independent, left-leaning HaQaretz (2/2): QHaQaretz has obtained some of the details [of DubaiQs investigation into the assassination of senior Hamas official Mahmoud al-Mabhouh]; however, the mystery is far from solved. Even the first suspicion of Mabhouh's relatives and Hamas -- that the Mossad had taken out the man responsible for weapons-smuggling to Gaza -- has been replaced by suspicions that an Arab intelligence organization may have been responsible for his death.... Unofficially, Hamas has conceded that quite a few parties had an interest in taking out Mabhouh, who had become central to the Iran-Gaza axis.... Yesterday a Hamas source told HaQaretz that Mabhouh had been imprisoned in Egypt for almost a year in 2003 and that he was wanted not only by the Israelis, but also by the Jordanians and the Egyptians and did not lack enemies.

### IV. QBibi Made It through the Year

Senior columnist and longtime peace advocate Yoel Marcus wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/2): QFrom a bird's-eye view, the positive aspects of [Benjamin NetanyahuQs] term so far exceed the negative.... Relations with America were preserved, thanks to his Bar-Ilan University speech. Obama, who wanted a pan-Islamic agreement, apparently was unaware of the Talmudic saying according to which if you grasp for too much, you'll end up with nothing. And the Palestinians, as is their wont, helped Bibi with their stubborn refusal to begin negotiations. Good for Bibi, not good for peace. Bibi was not dragged into wars like the two during Olmert's term.... If I were a speechwriter for Bibi I would propose that in his address to the nation he boast that despite Sara, despite [Likud minister] Silvan [Shalom], despite [opposition leader Tzipi] Livni, and despite Obama, his great achievement has been to get through the year.

### IV. QItQs All Politics

Giora Eiland, former Director of IsraelQs National Security Council, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/2): QThe proponents of establishing an [Israeli] commission of inquiry argue that the establishment of such a commission will reduce international pressure on us and the danger of having top Israeli officials prosecuted overseas. That is completely baseless because the pressure on Israel is political in nature, and not issue-oriented. In 2002 the Secretary-General [of the United Nations] sponsored the establishment of a commission of inquiry because of the QJenin massacre.Q Why was that commission of inquiry scuttled before it was ever formed? Because Israel succeeded in recruiting both the U.S. administration and the Congress against it. In other words, neither justice nor law are the tools of the game, only pure politics. The establishment of a commission of inquiry in Israel will not ease the pressure on us; rather, it will only encourage hostile people to continue to pressure Israel.

### VI. QDangerous Resistance

Conservative Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (2/2): QThe Goldstone Report is one of the worst libels against Israel. It is a report that continues the Durban syndrome and the campaign to deny the State of IsraelQs legitimacy. It is a report that presents Israel as a state whose existence boils down to revenge against the Palestinians and the perpetration of war crimes and crimes against humanity. There is no greater lie. The inquiry that the IDF already completed -- a thorough and serious inquiry -- refutes those false claims. There is no whitewashing in it, it is a true inquiry -- an inquiry with results. An inquiry that found that there were also deviations that led to prosecution. But official Israel continues to hesitate. QYesQ to an inquiry, including of officers, QnoQ to a commission of inquiry. If we are so confident of the findings, why not give them the seal of approval with an official investigation? After all, IsraelQs loss by evading an investigative committee is much greater than what will happen if such a committee is formed.... This time the issue is the need to remove the badge of shame that has been affixed to the State of

Israel.

## VII. QHarassing Arab Knesset Members

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (2/2): QInstead of calling on Arab lawmakers to act as a bridge between Israel and the Arab world, Israel puts them on trial under a law that should never have been passed in the first place. The law barring Knesset members from visiting Arab countries is not merely a harmful one that impedes their efforts to engage in public activity on behalf of their voters. It is also discriminatory, because it is aimed only at them. Whether the purpose of a visit is to make contacts in Arab countries to help advance the cause of peace, to see relatives, or to make a pilgrimage, the state should give Arab Knesset members freedom of action and of movement, on condition, of course, that they do not commit security-related offenses.

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¶2. Iraq:  
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QThis Was a Just War

Shlomo Avineri, Hebrew University Professor of Political Science and former director-general of the Foreign Ministry, wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/2): QPeople who say that the war in Iraq was unjust are actually saying that the world would be better off if Saddam were still in power. This is absurd, from both the practical and the moral standpoint. And therein lies the response to all those who find themselves defending one of the most abominable dictators of our times because of their hostility toward America or George W. Bush. As for the weapons of mass destruction, there was no one who could say with certainty before the war that Saddam did not have them in his arsenal. [Tony] Blair's testimony [in the Chilcot Inquiry] brings the discussion back to the concrete reasons for the war, which are valid even though a democratic government has not been established in Iraq. Saddam Hussein and his regime deserved to be removed from the face of the earth, even if the United Nations, like the League of Nations before it, was incapable of making a courageous decision on the matter. The world without Saddam is not an ideal world, but it is more secure and less murderous. Political choices are not always between an ideal good and an absolute evil. The world is a bit too complex for that.

CUNNINGHAM